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CIA study sees Soviet near to missile defense

By Charles W. Corddry
Washington Bureau of The Sun

WASHINGTON — The Soviet Union now has the "potential" to deploy a countrywide defense against ballistic missiles, "breaking out" of the 1972 treaty limiting such arms, White House officials said yesterday. Other sources said as many as 3,000 missile interceptors could be produced by 1990.

Drawing on a new intelligence estimate, the White House officials also said Moscow was in the process of replacing nearly all its offensive nuclear missiles with "new and improved systems" in a program to be completed by the mid-1990s.

Details of what the White House sources called an "unparalleled" missile buildup are contained in a new National Intelligence Estimate (NIE-11-3-8-85) prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency.

In a rare development, two CIA officials — Lawrence Gershwin and Robert Gates — are to give public testimony on the Soviet advances tomorrow before a joint session of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the defense subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Senator James A. McClure (R, Idaho), an appropriations panel member, requested the testimony because, a spokesman said, the senator thought the CIA's "startling information" should be made public, after being "sanitized" to protect secret data.

The testimony is to be given against a background of opposition by conservatives like Mr. McClure to defense budget cuts, and of Soviet efforts to forestall American development of a missile defense system popularly called "star wars."

There is controversy over whether elements of the U.S. "star wars" missile defense undertaking could violate the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty. The administration contends the effort, formally called the Strategic Defense Initiative, is strictly research thus far, which is allowed under the treaty.

An actual construction and deployment program would be a matter for negotiation with the Soviet Union under administration plans, as Paul H. Nitze, the chief adviser on arms negotiations, reiterated to reporters yesterday. The Soviets thus far won't discuss it, he said.

The 1972 treaty limits each side

to a single ABM site with no more than 100 interceptor-missile launchers — the number each side had or planned at the time of the treaty. The United States decided against one. The Soviet Union's is around Moscow.

The idea was that abandoning such defenses would avert a race in offensive missiles to overcome the defenses.

The Reagan administration has argued that while the Soviets protest SDI research they go on developing new ABM systems.

The new CIA study "details a massive Soviet buildup" of new offensive weapons and produces "equal concern" about missile defenses, the White House officials said. Improvements in ABMs have produced "a potential for deployment of a widespread ballistic missile defense of national territory," they said.

Whether the CIA witnesses would give numerical estimates in public testimony was uncertain. But sources familiar with the study said it included a range of projections of Soviet capabilities, including one for producing 3,000 missile interceptors by the end of this decade.

The sources said the Soviets were testing all the components for deployments "well in excess of ABM treaty limits." These components included radar, launchers, advanced high-speed interceptor missiles and weapons like the new SA-12, which may double as anti-aircraft missiles and interceptors of ballistic missiles such as the U.S. Pershing and Lance in Europe.

All the potential deployments discussed in the CIA study apparently would be ground-based, and thus distinct from such ambitious efforts as space-based elements of the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative.

But the study emphasizes Moscow's "significant progress" in research on directed energy weapons — lasers and particle beams — as well.

The CIA analysts says three new intercontinental missiles are ready for testing. One is the huge replacement for the 10-warhead SS-18, currently the world's largest weapon. The other two are new, mobile versions of the SS-24 and SS-25, the sources said.

When the SS-24 and SS-25 originally appeared, the administration said they were both new types missiles and added up to a violation of the 1979 SALT-2 treaty, which limited each side to one new type.

President Reagan recently announced that the United States would continue to observe the unratified 1979 agreement, which would expire December 31, and would accordingly dismantle an older missile submarine to stay within numerical limits as a new Trident sub enters service.

Mr. Reagan has to make a new decision by the end of the year and has indicated that one would be influenced by signs of Soviet restraint and pursuit of arms reduction agreements in current Geneva talks.

Mr. Nitze said yesterday that the president took the action he did to allow more time for results in Geneva. But Mr. Nitze said he personally doubted that there was time for progress there between now and the end of the year.